

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) today expressed deep disappointment and alarm that Sudan's first elections in more than 25 years were fraught with serious human rights infringements and irregularities, ensuring a victory by President Omar al-Bashir. These abuses must be fixed to ensure free, fair, and credible referenda on January 9, 2011, urged USCIRF.

"We had hoped that these first elections in 25 years for Sudan could be conducted in a free and fair environment, but serious infringements on freedom of speech and assembly, as well as systemic manipulation by President Bashir and Khartoum's ruling party, flawed the entire electoral process," said Leonard Leo, USCIRF chair.

"Unless the underlying problems are resolved, these same abuses and irregularities could jeopardize the referenda in Southern Sudan and Abyei, increasing the potential of a renewal of a religiously-stoked conflict between Northern and Southern Sudanese, which could again lead to the deaths and displacement of millions," said Mr. Leo.

The U.S. government and international community must provide adequate resources and technical assistance to ensure that referenda logistics, such as registering voters and preparations for the poll, are conducted in a transparent and timely manner, and that legislation which currently limits freedom of speech, association, and assembly is revised. The parties must also begin immediately the difficult task of agreeing on post-2011 arrangements.

"In the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the people of Southern Sudan and of Abyei were promised a free choice as to their political future. Those choices must be respected through free, fair, and credible referenda," said Mr. Leo.

Finding that the elections failed to meet international standards, international observers, including The Carter Center and the European Union, noted violations of political rights, lack of competition, significant logistical challenges, and voter registration irregularities. During the campaign period, observers and opposition parties also reported serious problems, including harassment and detention of party activities, repressive press and national security laws, allegations of voter registration fraud and delays in reviewing voter registration lists, a biased National Elections Commission, continuing insecurity in Darfur, and poor voter education. Failure by the National Congress Party to address these concerns led several parties, including the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, to boycott the presidential race.

USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission. USCIRF

Commissioners are appointed by the President and the leadership of both political parties in the Senate and the House of Representatives. USCIRF's principal responsibilities are to review the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom internationally and to make policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and Congress. To interview a USCIRF Commissioner, contact Tom Carter, Communications Director [tcarter@uscirf.gov](mailto:tcarter@uscirf.gov), or (202) 523-3257